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FRENCH ART.

THE tendency of the younger school of French artists during the last fifteen years has been toward depicting the every-day life of our great cities and rural districts in its naked truth, and often in its intense ugliness. Whether this is reaction from the older school, or the result of democratic ideas, or the outcome of the teaching of Victor Hugo, certain it is that in the place of the idealized peasants of Hébert, and the sentimental fisher-girls of Feyen-Perrin, we have the realistic peasants of Bastien-Lepage, Feyen, and Le Rolle, and the hardy fisher-women of Beyle and Hagborg in all their native clumsiness, ugliness, and awkwardness. Artisans are no longer represented in clean blouses or Sunday garments, but appear in clothes begrimed with the dirt of the workshop, as in Raffaëlli's "Forgerons." And yet these younger men do not entirely ignore the poetic side in the lives of the poor, as we may see in the works of some of these painters—Beyle and Feyen, for instance; but the desire to represent working women with sentimental smiles, delicate hands and feet, and small waists is a thing of the past. Israël's work has perhaps done something toward influencing

his younger brethren of the brush; but for years he stood alone in sight of at once the pathetic and plain side of toiling humanity. One is more inclined to think that the change has taken place by reason of the intense sympathy with the hard-working and much-suffering classes which no doubt is one of the signs of the times (a sympathy preached for many a year by Victor Hugo, but stifled from its birth by despotic governments); and also from an equally intense love of truth, for truth's sake, in Art. Some years ago *dame du monde* pictures were the fashion, such as those by De Jonghe, Toulmouche, and Saintin; but now the rage seems to be for canvases large and small (more often large) consecrated to such subjects as the "Chantier," by Roll—a huge picture of a stone-mason's yard, with life-sized figures. That every phase of life may be worth painting, if truthfully rendered, is no doubt a fact; but an artist ought to have some idea of the fitness of things as regards subject and size of canvas. De Nittis' small pictures of a Parisian boulevard or square are as charming as they are refined and true; but the same subjects life-size become vulgar and commonplace. Two years ago we were edified by an enormous picture, covering

an entire side of a large room, representing the corner of the Place de la Madeleine, with carriages and pedestrians hurrying by ; and if Béraud's "Opera Stalls" and Gilbert's "Markets" were of these dimensions, they would be unworthy the notice they now receive.

Portraiture, as well as other branches of Art, has been influenced by this crusade in the cause of truth. For one portrait arranged in the old-fashioned conventional manner, we find a dozen persons painted in their every-day attire, sitting in their drawing-rooms, or studies, or gardens. And in so far as a painter eschews extreme fashion of any kind, this is as it should be. The feeble attempts of some artists to attire modern English women in sham Gainsborough or Reynolds costume must fail as effectually as do the efforts of the photographer to place his sitters picturesquely by means of sham rustic bridges and painted Ionic columns. The chief value of a portrait is that it should be true ; and had the old masters falsified the dress of their personages as some moderns do, half the interest of their works would be gone.

No nation has produced so many good military painters as France ; and one of the few benefits she has acquired from the last miserable war is a multitude of excellent painters of soldier life. This is no doubt due to the fact that during the struggle all the younger men, artists as well as others, did their best to help their country in her hour of need. Patriotism fired the souls of tranquil brain-workers, as it did those of men whose passion is for slaying and killing ; and it is to this fact that we owe all those pathetic episodes of the Franco-German campaign which De Neuville has been painting for the

last fourteen or fifteen years. Neither M. Detaille nor De Neuville were represented at last year's Salon. The former is engrossed by his great work, "L'Histoire de l'Armée depuis un Siècle" ; and illness prevented the latter from finishing his last picture, "Le Parlementaire." This is not inferior to "Le Bourget" or "Le Cimetière de St. Privat" in movement and dramatic incident, and it touches the chord of patriotism in an intensely pathetic manner. But, like so many of the younger French painters, De Neuville has been taken away from us ere half his work was finished : Leloir, Bastien-Lepage, De Neuville, and now Baudry, the graceful portrait and decorative painter, the splendid colorist, and the unselfish, self-sacrificing man. How many of our modern artists would devote eight years to study when at the height of their reputation ? And yet Baudry did this. Feeling unable to begin his decoration of the Opera House without more study of the great masters, he left Paris, and therewith an income from portrait painting which was ten times greater than the sum which the State offered him. But early struggles had taught him self-sacrifice, and eight years' banishment and study seemed to him a small matter in comparison with "la gloire." It is doubtful, however, if the *Opera foyer* is his best work ; yet it will always be to his honor that he sacrificed a certain amount of worldly success for lasting fame. He received 200,000 francs (£8,000) for the work, which extended over some ten or twelve years — but poor payment in Modern Art's eyes.

Amongst the votaries of the *dame du monde* school, and one of the best, is M. Kaemmerer, a native of the Hague, but a pupil of M. Gérôme, and a French-

man in all but nationality. His subjects are generally taken from modern fashionable life, though sometimes he conducts us back to the times of Louis XV. His curious and prosaic "Soir d'Automne," for instance, shows us the abandoned sands of Scheveningen, peopled only by two ladies and a gentleman, the band, and a host of chairs. The general effect is *triste*, and characteristic of a place when the season is over. To our generation, this kind of subject may not be particularly interesting; but to our great-grandchildren it will be eminently so. Pictures which portray the manners and customs of a certain period are quite worth painting, if done in a refined manner. For example, what can be more entertaining than Velasquez's "Boar Hunt," with that group of elegant dandies, the procession of green coaches, and the vulgar crowd sprawling upon the ground?

On the other hand, when a painter is void of refinement, and gives us steam-boat loads and railway stations crowded with the vulgarest people in the most repulsive garments, we may well wish that he would not send us down to posterity in such fearsome guise. But if the artist of this school changed his subjects, would much be gained in refinement?

The opinion used to be promulgated, and is still in certain circles, that the French are not landscapists—an opinion quite opposed to fact. True, there is little of the pre-Raphaelite manner of seeing nature, but of poetic landscape there is much. Up to the second dec-

ade of this century, classical landscape prevailed. Poussin, and later on Vernet, looked at inanimate nature with Claude de Lorrain's eyes, though without his poetic feeling. But a change came over this branch of Art when a Constable appeared at the Salon. It was one of those exhibited at the Royal Academy this last winter, if I mistake not. Here was a revolutionist, a man who dared to paint a mill, or a punt, or a farm, as they appeared to the vulgar crowd. That common country scenery and objects of every-day rural life should be put upon canvas was too rank heresy for the followers in the footsteps of the classical landscapists. This Constable, then, created a veritable furore: the master became the fashion and the founder of the new school of landscape romanticists, numbering within its fold De-camps, Dupré, Corot, Daubigny, Rousseau, Troyon, and Diaz. The painters of the present day are not inferior to their elder brethren, and there is scarcely any exhibition where one sees so many good landscapes as at the Salon. Even M. Montenard's vessels riding at anchor in southern waters under a blaze of sunlight, and M. Pointelin's studies of the melancholy and gray effects of nature, are equally worthy to find a place amongst poetic landscapes. And amongst other names of *paysagistes de talent* may be cited MM. Harpignies Ségué, Zuber, Damoye, Van Marke, François, Morlon, Courant, Boudin (in spite of his eternal monotonous gray), Mesdag, Lansyer, and Mesdames de la Villette and Dieterle.

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